
Education Committee

HB 2903

Brief Description: Making reforms necessary to improve student academic achievement.

Sponsors: Representatives Talcott, Quall, Cox, Curtis, Roach, Orcutt, Holmquist, Woods, Shabro, Ericksen, Anderson, Serben, Nixon, Haler, McCune, Haigh, Sump, Priest, Armstrong, Santos, Hinkle, Strow, Newhouse and Rodne.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) to cease further implementation of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in grades three, five, six, and eight and seek a waiver from the federal No Child Left Behind Act.
- Requires SPI approval of Learning Assistance Program plans submitted from school districts in a federal needs improvement status and withholding of funds until approval.
- Requires districts to offer diagnostic tests to eighth, ninth, and tenth grade students before the WASL and requires the SPI to release the full WASL test beginning in 2008.
- Requires school districts to offer college placement tests to all tenth grade students.
- Authorizes students to use mathematics scores on certain college placement tests as an alternative assessment for the mathematics portion of the WASL.

Hearing Date: 1/30/06

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)

In order to receive federal funds under Title I, each state's assessment system must include yearly assessments of students in each of grades three through eight in reading and mathematics, plus at least one assessment of these subjects for high school students by the end of the 2005-06 school year. By 2007-08, assessments in science must be administered in at least one elementary, middle, and high school grade. For Washington, the additional testing requirement beyond the state's current assessment system will be reading and mathematics assessments administered in grades three, five, six, and eight. The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) is implementing the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in reading and mathematics at each grade level required to be assessed under NCLB.

The NCLB also requires each state to set annual goals for improvement in student achievement, by subject area, for all students, and for groups of students. Schools or school districts that do not meet their annual goals (annual yearly progress or AYP) for two consecutive years are considered in a "needs improvement" status.

Learning Assistance Program (LAP)

The 2005-07 biennial budget appropriated approximately \$155 million for the LAP program, which provides extra assistance for low-achieving students. Although funding is allocated through a formula based on numbers of low-income students, each school district must submit an annual program plan for the SPI's approval. The plan identifies the activities that will be supported with the funds, data on student achievement, how students will be identified, qualifications of staff, and other elements.

WASL Results

Each fall, parents of students who took the WASL the previous spring receive their student's results. Some information is provided about content and skill areas where the student may need improvement, but the test questions and student answers to individual questions are not released for test security reasons.

The SPI has a schedule of test question development, pilot testing, use, and expiration. After a test question has been used several times, it is discarded because any recognition of the question might bias the test results. In 2001, the SPI began releasing these discarded test questions, along with student responses, so that schools can use them to diagnose areas where students are having difficulty. These results are also available on the agency's website and aggregated at the school, district, or state level. Approximately one-third of the total questions from the WASL are tentatively scheduled to be released in this fashion each year.

Starting with the class of 2006, a student's highest score and level in each content area of the high school WASL will be displayed on the student's transcript.

Diagnostic Testing

Prior to 2005, school districts were required to administer nationally norm-referenced tests such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) to all third, sixth, and ninth grade students. Legislation enacted in 2005 repealed this requirement, but stated that the Legislature intended to allow school districts to continue using these types of assessments at district expense. The legislation also directed the SPI, within available funds and by September 1, 2006, to make diagnostic assessments available to school districts to help improve student learning. To the maximum extent possible, these diagnostic assessments must be aligned to the state's Grade Level Expectations, individualized to each student, provide results in a timely fashion, and be capable of measuring student growth over time.

College Placement Tests

Colleges and universities use a number of different tests to help determine whether students are prepared for college-level work. Some high schools in Washington are working with local community or technical colleges to administer college placement tests to 10th or 11th grade students as a way to provide early information about college readiness. They also use the results

as a planning and guidance tool with students. In its interim report to the Legislature, the Washington Learns steering committee recommended use of college placement tests for all 10th or 11th grade students for this purpose.

Alternative Assessments

In 2004, the Legislature authorized the SPI to develop options for one or more objective alternative assessments that high school students could use to demonstrate they meet the state academic standards required for high school graduation instead of relying on the WASL for this purpose. To use an alternative, a student must take the WASL at least twice. Implementation of an alternative assessment for actual use must be formally approved by the Legislature.

According to SPI's feasibility study for the alternative assessments, several states with high school exit examinations similar to Washington permit students to use a substitute exam. North Carolina, Idaho, and Florida each permit scores on the American College Test (ACT) or the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) to be used as an alternative to the state test. North Carolina also permits scores from other college entrance or college placement tests to be used as an alternative assessment, such as the Preliminary SAT (PSAT), COMPASS, or ACCUPLACER.

Summary of Bill:

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

Effective immediately, the SPI is directed to cease all further implementation of the WASL in third, fifth, sixth, and eighth grade. The SPI must seek a temporary waiver from federal statutory and regulatory requirements regarding the annual assessment in these grades. The SPI must convene a review panel to examine a range of assessment options that could satisfy NCLB, with particular consideration of locally-selected or administered diagnostic assessments. A report of the findings is submitted to the Legislature by December 1, 2006. Any further implementation of the state's assessment system to comply with NCLB must be formally authorized by the Legislature.

Learning Assistance Program

School districts that are meeting federal AYP standards, Educational Service Districts, the Association of Washington School Principals, and the Washington Association of School Administrators are all required to submit a list of instructional best practices for the LAP program to the SPI. The SPI posts the combined list on the agency website for use by teachers, parents, and the public.

School districts that are in a federal needs improvement status must use one or more of the best practices on the list in their LAP program plans. For these districts, the SPI reviews the plan and can approve it or require amendments. The SPI withholds state LAP funds until the plan is approved. Districts in a needs improvement status must spend LAP funds only according to their approved plan.

WASL Results

Beginning with the 2008 assessment, the SPI must release the complete tenth grade WASL, including correct responses, at the same time as student scores are released. Test information provided to parents must include the student's responses compared to correct responses, plus

information about how to obtain a copy of the test. School districts must supply paper or electronic copies of the test on request.

A student's highest WASL score and level appear on the transcript beginning with the class of 2008, rather than 2006, for reading, writing, and mathematics. Science scores appear beginning in 2010.

Diagnostic Testing

The Legislature intends to provide funding for school districts to offer norm-referenced assessments, rather than only permitting districts to offer these tests at their own expense. Beginning in the 2006-07 school year, to the extent funds are provided, school districts must administer diagnostic testing in grades eight, nine, and ten to identify academic weaknesses and develop targeted instruction before the high school WASL. The SPI has until September 1, 2007, to make diagnostic tests available to school districts. To the maximum extent possible, tests should allow student progress to be compared to other students across the country.

College Placement Tests

The SPI must make a college readiness or college placement test available to school districts, selected from commercial products. Districts must offer the test to tenth grade students, at no cost to the student. Students are encouraged but not required to take the test.

Alternative Assessments

A student's score on the mathematics portion of the PSAT, SAT, or ACT can be used as an objective alternative assessment for demonstrating that the student has met the mathematics standard to earn a Certificate of Academic Achievement. The State Board of Education identifies the scores students must achieve on these tests to meet the state standard for mathematics.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause. Section 1, which ceases further development of the WASL in grades three, five, six, and eight, takes effect immediately.